DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 359 716 EC 302 278

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TITLE When School Isn't Special: A Call for Reform of Special Education in Baltimore City Public Schools. A Report by Students First.
INSTITUTION Advocates for Children and Youth, Baltimore, MD.
PUB DATE May 93
NOTE 103p.; Photographs will not reproduce clearly.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Change Strategies; *Disabilities; Early Intervention; *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Parent Participation; Public Schools; *Regular and Special Education Relationship; School Administration; School Districts; School Role; *Special Education; Staff Development
IDENTIFIERS *Baltimore City Public Schools MD

ABSTRACT

This report critically examines special education in Baltimore (Maryland) public schools and proposes major reform of Baltimore's special education system. Criticisms focus on: poor instructional quality (there is little "special" about special education); segregation of special education students from regular education; special education used as a dumping ground for slow learners and trouble makers; little attempt at early intervention; poor outcomes despite expensive programs; and an inefficient and ineffective bureaucratic system. A series of recommendations is preceded by a list of desired outcomes. These include higher self-esteem for special education students, early intervention to prevent unnecessary placement in special education, ending excessive bureaucracy and red tape, and raising graduation and attendance rates. Six initiatives are proposed: (1) creation of a mission statement; (2) taking responsibility to the schools; (3) creation of one system for all students; (4) staff development and support; (5) encouragement of family participation; and (6) improved management. A previous court-commissioned plan for reform is outlined and endorsed. Requirements of federal and state law as well as a 1984 consent decree are summarized. The report also offers recommendations to implement the six proposed initiatives. (Contains 35 references.) (DB)

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WHEN SCHOOL ISN'T SPECIAL

A call for reform of Special Education in Baltimore City Public Schools

MAY 1993

A Report by **Students First,** *a project of ADVOCATES for CHILDREN and YOUTH, Inc.*

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MAY 1993

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Table of Contents

Introduction..... i

An Overview: When School Isn't Special 1

The Law and the Consent Decree..... 15

Little is Special in Special Education..... 17

Separate and Often Unequal..... 20

A System that Doesn't Work for Students..... 22

How the System Can Work for Students..... 25

Endnotes..... 40

Selected Bibliography..... 45

A report by **Students First,** a project of ADVOCATES for CHILDREN and YOUTH

Introduction

As Baltimore City Public Schools begins to address the long-delayed reform of Special Education, Students First believes it is important that the changes which happen produce community discussion and support. Reform efforts must be the result, in part, of participation of families. As this report illustrates, for too long Special Education has been the "dumping ground" for students who many, often well-meaning, instructors have not found ways to accommodate or teach in regular classrooms.

At last count, more than 17,000 of Baltimore's young people were receiving special education services. Baltimore cannot afford to waste any more time before correcting the serious problems outlined in this report.

Baltimore City Public Schools finds itself is in an opportune position. A well thought out plan for reform has already been provided to the system by Court-appointed experts. What is now needed is the determination to make schools special for all children.

We applaud the school administration's efforts toward that goal. But something more must happen. We ask that the plan of the Court-appointed team be implemented in large part. It is time to end the legal battles and start the hard work of improvement. The larger community must support bold actions for reform and make their voices heard. Decisive changes and strong leadership are imperative to make positive outcomes for *all* students a reality.

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An Overview: When School Isn't Special

"There was a farmer, had a dog and Bingo was his name-o. B-I-N-G-O..."

The singing from the classroom could be heard in the hallway. The room displayed cut-out paper flowers and animals on the doors and bulletin boards. The teacher spoke in a soft tone one often hears adults use with young children. When students performed well, they were allowed to pet a stuffed animal.

> Parents of pre-school or primary grade students might be happy to have their children in such classes. But the students in these classes were not young children, they were teenagers in Baltimore City high schools.[1]

Education experts believe scenarios like this seriously damage the self-esteem and motivation of students involved.[2] Low expectations and a failure to provide challenging or even age-appropriate materials are just some of the findings of recent studies of Special Education in Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS).[3] The effects are felt by more than 17,000 students who are in Special Education in BCPS. The outcomes that result speak for themselves. The drop out rate and absenteeism among Special Education students is even higher than the already dismal figures for all BCPS students.

For those who do stay in school, there is little or no access to vocational education programs. Expectations for these students are so low that no uniform data is kept on educational outcomes or achievement by Special Education students.[4] Once a student goes into Special Education, the chances of re-entering regular education are nearly non-existent.[5]

LITTLE IS SPECIAL IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Researchers found that once students are identified for Special Education services in Baltimore, often there is little *special* about the education they receive. Although researchers believed that most teachers were committed to student learning, they found that teachers' expectations were low and approaches to teaching often unimaginative.[6] One team of researchers found that because special education teachers did not expect their students to do well, they taught the same material repetitively, using the same methods over and over, even after repeated student failures.[7]

Teachers received little support in developing educational programs and materials for Special Education students. They even had difficulty getting access to the general curriculum in order to adapt it for their students.[8]

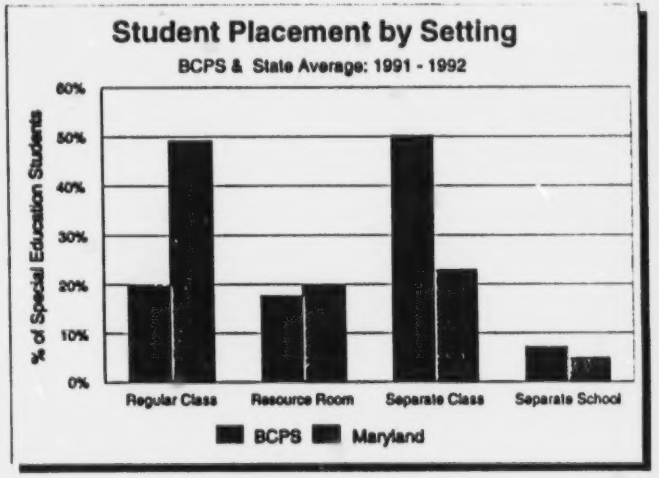
Despite laws to the contrary, little evidence exists that students receive any "individualized" instruction.[9] The availability of Special Education services is required by state and federal law, so that *all*

students are entitled to receive the instruction they need. Special Education laws require the development of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for every student. But too often teachers who are supposed to be providing the services outlined in the plan *don't even have a copy of the IEP*. Even if they are using the IEP as a guide, many teachers said that the plan usually consists of what the school wants to provide to the student, not what the student really needs.[10]

By law, IEP's are supposed to be developed with input from each student's family. Researchers found that often IEP's are developed before families are involved and that once families do meet with school officials, their viewpoints are ignored.[11] Parents complained that although the school system's central office was usually accessible to them, school principals were not and the teachers responsible for providing their children with instruction had very negative attitudes toward the children.[12]

MOST STUDENTS SEGREGATED FROM REGULAR EDUCATION

The law encourages schools to provide Special Education services to students while they remain part of a regular class, yet a large number of Special Education students in Baltimore end up in separate classes, or even separate schools, segregated from other children and the opportunities provided in a regular education setting. More than three-fifths of the students in Baltimore's Special Education program - 62.6 percent - are instructed in separate settings. That figure compares to the state average of 31.5 percent of special education students in separate settings.[13]



Regular class - Students receiving special education services outside the regular classroom for less than 21% of the school day.

Resource room - Students receiving special education services outside the regular classroom for 21% - 60% of the school day.

Separate class - Students receiving special education services in a regular school, outside the regular classroom for more than 60% of the day.

Separate school - Students receiving special education services more than 50% of the school day in a separate public facility.

Note: This chart does not include placements in private settings and, therefore, percentages will not total 100%.

[Source: Maryland Department of Education, Maryland Special Education, Least Restrictive Environment Placements 1991-1992.]

Besides being the most costly way to educate these students, putting them into separate classrooms creates a "label" that attaches to a child and is hard to overcome. One psychologist found that the label of being "difficult to teach" may create more problems for the student than the disability itself does.[14] Other researchers have found that removing students from the regular classroom limits students' expectation of success and lowers self-esteem, peer acceptance and academic performance.[15] In Baltimore, attorneys representing children assigned to separate Special Education classes or schools often find that the children respond by cutting school so they don't have to face the stigma of being different.[16]

BCPS Special Education Attendance Rates

1991-1992 School Year

Intensity of Service	Setting	Attendance Rate
I	in regular classes	89.7%
II	in regular classes	89.1%
III	in regular classes/resource room	86.6%
IV	in separate classes	81.8%
V	in separate classes/schools	84.3%
VII	in home/hospital setting	75.7%

Average special education	84.4%
Average general education	88.3%

[SOURCE: Baltimore City Public Schools, Department of Research and Evaluation]

Attendance figures support the experiences of these attorneys. While the average attendance rate for special education students is lower than that of regular education students, the attendance rate drops nearly five percent when comparing the attendance of students who are in separate classes to those who are able to participate in regular classes.[17]

Students in separate classes are also suspended or expelled from school more often than their peers. While more than 4 percent of all special education students in separate classes are suspended or expelled, figures from BCPS show that less than 2 percent of students who are not in special education are suspended or expelled. And the 1991-92 drop out rate for students in separate classes is three and one-half percentage points higher than the rate for students who are not in special education.[18]

The administration of BCPS has proposed closing three separate Special Education schools in coming years, but no plan has been developed which outlines how those students will be included in regular school settings.

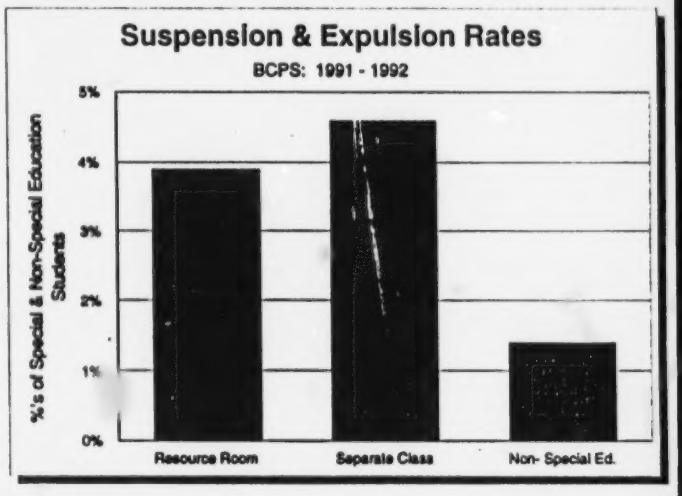
SPECIAL EDUCATION: DUMPING GROUND

The failure to provide adequate instruction to students hurts a disproportionate number of children in Baltimore City. For many years, BCPS has led the state of Maryland - and, at times, the entire nation - in the percentage of students in special education

programs. For the 1986 - 1987 school year, 16 percent of all students enrolled in Baltimore City Public Schools were in special education - the highest percentage of any major city in the United States.[19] During the 1991-1992 school year, 15.5 percent of students in the city public schools (more than 17,000 students) were receiving some form of special education services, compared to a statewide average of 12 percent.[20] In some Baltimore City high schools, more than one third of students are identified as having special education needs.[21]

In Baltimore City, researchers from the University of Maryland and other institutions found that Special Education has become a "dumping ground for slow learners and troublemakers".[22] A large number of students in Special Education are those who present behavior problems in regular classroom settings. It is a symptom of a larger problem in BCPS. Many classroom teachers are not equipped to handle the diverse needs of a vast number of students who are coming to school today.

Unfortunately, once students enter Special Education classes, there is no guarantee they will receive more appropriate behavior management. Suspension and expulsion rates for Special Education students are higher than for the rest of the student population. This prompted the Court-appointed design team to note:



[Source: Baltimore City Public Schools, Department of Research and Evaluation.]

> It would appear that currently the regular education program is incapable of handling most of the students with disabilities for any length of time during the school day. What caused the Team even greater concern is the fact that special education is not able to tolerate the students either. This is demonstrated by the increasing rate of suspension of special education students who are enrolled totally in full time special education settings.[23]

Psychologists who conduct assessments to determine which students need Special Education often don't have knowledge of current practices in evaluating the needs and abilities of cultural minorities or

students with disabilities in general.[24] Researchers conclude that psychological testing, which is frequently done to show that a child needs Special Education in Baltimore, is not the appropriate method to make that decision, especially with African-American children.[25] The validity of using psychological tests has been seriously questioned by education experts and the courts.[26]

Identification of students for Special Education often happens in an environment of unclear standards and guidelines. A national survey of standards used to assign students to Special Education showed that 80 percent of the total U.S. population could be classified as "learning disabled" under the standards currently in use.[27] The result is the "dumping ground" researchers discovered. The label of "learning disabled" has become a convenient catch-all for removing students who cause trouble or are having difficulties keeping up. Nearly half of the students in special education in Baltimore City - 45.1 percent - are classified as having a Specific Learning Disability.[28] The vast majority of those students are segregated from their peers and educated in separate classes.[29]

Interviews with teachers and administrators showed a widespread perception that Special Education was the only way to get help for children with low achievement or behavior problems.[30] Teachers in regular education expressed frustration that they could not get more of their students into Special Education classes.[31] The reality, according to some researchers, is that many of these students should not be in separate special education classes, and could thrive in a flexible regular education setting with well-trained and supported teachers.

LITTLE ATTEMPT AT EARLY INTERVENTION

Unfortunately, the regular education classes provided to many students in BCPS are not flexible or staffed with well-trained and supported teachers. Classes are often overcrowded. Resources are tight. Teachers are often not acquainted with or willing to employ alternative teaching methods that could help keep students in regular classes. For many years there has been no system in place to support teachers who seek to help students who are having trouble. Little attention is paid to early intervention - to working with students before their performance has fallen so far behind that teachers are unable to meet their needs in a regular class.

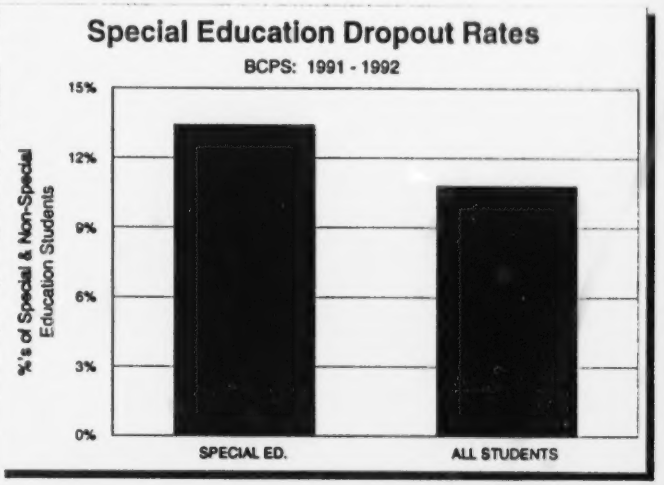
Some programs in place in BCPS are effective at preventing the placement of students into Special Education. Success for All, a program in Baltimore elementary schools, has cut referrals to Special Education almost in half. Preliminary statistics show that over six years, 10 percent of students who started first grade in Success for All were assigned to Special Education, whereas 19 percent of stu-

dents in a similar class ended up in Special Education.[32] The approach of Success for All is to closely monitor student progress and meet special needs as they arise, not only when they become a chronic problem.

Another initiative within BCPS called the Consulting Teacher program assigns master teachers to work with other classroom teachers in 50 elementary schools to provide support and additional instruction on alternative methods to meet the needs of students. In its first semester, Special Education referrals were reduced by 35 percent.[33]

EXPENSIVE PROGRAMS, POOR OUTCOMES

The more students are separated from others in regular education, the more costly it is to provide instruction. The laws set clear limits on the number of Special Education students who may be taught by a teacher (with or without an aide) in a separate setting, and as the student/teacher ratio declines, more money must be spent on staff. But in Baltimore, the results have not been positive over all. The more students are segregated from their regular education peers, the more they are absent and drop out of school.



[Source: Baltimore City Public Schools, Department of Research and Evaluation]

BCPS spends more to educate Special Education students than any other school district in Maryland.[34] The high cost is the result of providing so many students instruction in separate classes and schools. While the average amount spent to educate regular education students in 1991-92 was $2,300, and the average amount spent to educate Special Education students in Baltimore City classrooms was $6,800.[35] The cost to educate students with disabilities in separate schools within BCPS was about $11,000 per student.[36]

None of those figures include transportation. About $4,000 per pupil per year is spent to transport special education students on yellow buses to public schools within the BCPS system.[37] About 3,200 students receive that service.[38] This is the result, in part, of sending students to schools far from their homes, instead of including them in programs in their home schools.

While BCPS spends a larger percentage of its budget - 12.6 percent - to educate special education students than any other jurisdiction in Maryland, it ranks last out of 24 districts in terms of spending on regular instruction.[39] Of the $122 million spent on special education instruction in the 1991-92 school year (not including transportation costs), BCPS received less than $50 million from state and federal sources to help pay for special education.[40] The remainder of the money spent came from the general budget of the school system.[41]

In a district so inadequately funded, that money could be used more wisely to upgrade programs in students' home schools. Better regular education programs could reduce the number of referrals to Special Education. And for those students who truly need Special Education services, they could more often learn side by side with students who are not considered disabled. What's needed is teachers trained in the appropriate methods to work in teams with special education teachers and reform of the BCPS administration to place resources and accountability at the school level, where they are closest to students.

SYSTEM DOESN'T WORK

When Special Education laws were passed, the idea was to assure students' rights to a quality education and the opportunity for students with disabilities to participate as fully as possible in regular educational programs. Instead, what has developed is a massive bureaucracy of forms, tests, layers of red tape and little opportunity for students' needs to be met in a timely fashion.

In 1984, a lawsuit against BCPS was brought on behalf of Special Education students that had been recommended for special education services but were not given assessment or services for months, and sometimes years. Nearly a decade later, that suit is still in contention. A consent decree agreed to by all parties provided that BCPS would be monitored as it attempted to meet the requirements of the law. The school system has yet to be in compliance and it appears unlikely that it will meet the requirements any time soon.[42]

The reasons for the problems are numerous. Mismanagement and poorly trained staff have been blamed.[43] But even if BCPS was meeting all standards, it would be impossible to know. The school system fails to keep track of even the most basic

information about Special Education students. BCPS could not even say how many students were referred for evaluation in any given year nor how many entered Special Education.[44] BCPS is working to solve the problem with new computer programs that will help with data collection and reporting.

Better data collection is just the start of a remedy. Behaviors of the people who provide services to children must change, as well.[45] The procedures for placing students in Special Education and reviewing their progress are ineffective.[46] To ensure that each special education student is properly evaluated and that each IEP is designed to meet each student's individual needs, an ARD (Admission, Review and Dismissal) case manager is assigned to oversee groups of students. The Court-appointed experts found that the ARD process BCPS had established drains the school system's resources while failing to provide needed services to children.47

Decisions about how to assign staff are not made based upon the needs of students. For instance, ARD managers in elementary schools oversee the files of approximately 125 to 150 students, while in middle and high schools that number can be as high as 500.[48]

BLUE PRINT FOR CHANGE: A SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The picture that the research and statistics paints is that of a system which fails to put the needs of students first. The outcomes are predictable and shameful. But there is reason for hope. Some efforts across the nation and in Baltimore are producing positive results for children.

Students First believes Special Education reform must be given a high priority. The ultimate outcomes of this reform effort must include the following:

- Higher self-esteem for special education students
- Early intervention to stop the placement of students in special education who do not belong there
- End the separate - and distinctly unequal - relationship between general and special education
- Decentralize the management of special education
- End the excessive bureaucracy and red tape linked to special education
- Create policies, procedures and staff training which make it possible for students to exit special education
- Raise graduation and attendance rates

To accomplish these goals, Students First believes the following initiatives must be started or continued.

Initiative One: Creation of a Mission Statement

A clear mission statement which shows the commitment of the system to the education of all students must be shared with all staff and the community at large.

Initiative Two: Taking Responsibility to the Schools

Moving responsibility away from Central Office administrators and into the hands of professionals who are closer to the student is a critical element of improving special education.

Initiative Three: Create One System for All Students

Services for students who qualify for special education must be strengthened, with an emphasis on providing as many of those services as possible within the general education classroom. BCPS must institute:

- Inclusive Education Committees
- Early Intervention Teams
- Innovative Regular Education Programs
- Collaborative Teaching Teams
- Vocational and Post Secondary Transition

Initiative Four: Staff Development and Support

On-going training and support for BCPS staff and parents is crucial to the success of any reform effort.

Initiative Five: Family Participation

A formal program which not only allows parental involvement, but actively encourages it is fundamental to student achievement in all types of education.

Initiative Six: Improved Management

Improved management of the Department of Special Education and effective collaboration with other departments within BCPS is essential to any reform effort.

A plan for reform in Baltimore City has already been developed. In a 130-page report commissioned by the Federal District Court in the case brought by Baltimore Special Education students, a team of well-respected experts in Special Education have provided a blue print for bringing about the changes needed to improve the delivery of services to students.[49] The plan is designed to help BCPS meet the requirements of State and Federal Special Education Laws. Many of the recommendations of the February 1993 report are consistent with those of the BCPS management study, the Cresap/Towers Perrin report.[50] The following is a brief outline of the recommendations of the team:

I. Special Education for the Future: Effective Special Education for BCPS

A. Integrated Services - Students with disabilities should be educated in their home schools and included in regular education programs.

B. Program Support - Staff must receive on a continuing basis:

- training
- leadership
- assistance in identifying effective practices
- monitoring
- evaluation

C. Curriculum - Wherever appropriate, students with disabilities must be provided services that will help them perform on grade level and compete with students who are not disabled.

D. Instruction - Quality instruction includes:

- good presentation of material
- positive classroom environment
- high (and realistic) teacher expectations
- emphasis on student learning
- strategies to motivate students
- activities which involve students and meet their individual needs
- support and constructive feedback for teachers
- evaluations of progress

E. Preparation for Adult Life

- plans should be developed to help students as they make transitions to different schools, classes or settings
- they should be given the chance to develop skills in a community setting
- students with disabilities should have regular interaction with other students of their own age throughout the school day

F. Clear Standards for Performance - Measurable outcomes for schools must be developed and performance standards put in place.

G. Accountability for Performance - Accountability for student outcomes must rest with the principal of each school. The principal must:

- provide leadership
- set positive examples
- supervise staff based on clear standards for performance

II. Managing and Monitoring for Effectiveness

The principal is key to improvement in Special Education in BCPS. Services to students

should be decided upon and provided by staff at the school building and classroom level. This means that most staff would no longer be assigned to the central office, but instead would work out of schools, providing services directly to students. Staff assignments would be based upon the resources available and needs at each school.

A. Central Office

The central office should evaluate, support, monitor and process system-wide information. **All of these activities should be based upon student outcomes.** Most staff should be assigned to individual schools so they can provide direct services to students. All staff serving Special Education students should be supervised by principals and area superintendents, not central office supervisors.

B. Area Assistant Superintendents

Area Assistant Superintendents will coordinate services and assure that staff and resources are sent to schools where they are needed. They must also coordinate and institute teams to provide special services to students. This includes the continuation and coordination of the Consulting Teachers Program (see page 32).

C. Schools/Principals

Principals will be ultimately responsible for meeting the educational needs of the students in their schools. This means principals must receive training, resources and support to meet the standards set forth. Schools must have an ARD manager who can coordinate the planning, instruction and mentoring necessary to provide quality instruction and services at the school level.

D. Classrooms/Teachers

Clear standards must be developed so that teachers know the outcomes expected for their students. Special Education teachers must receive training (at least five days per year) and support as they attempt to meet those standards. All teachers who refer students for evaluation for special education must receive training about assessment and alternative teaching methods.

IV. Parents

Partnership is the key to assuring that student needs are met. Parents and principals are the two essential groups to making the needed changes in Special Education a reality.

- A formal process must be created for parents to be involved in the development and monitoring of new initiatives.
- Parents and principals should be trained to work with each other to solve students' educational needs.

- Parents must be involved in creating and carrying through BCPS staff training and BCPS staff should participate in parent training.

V. Monitoring and Long Term Accountability

For many years, BCPS has spent much time, energy and money to calculate the number of students who are *not* receiving appropriate services. Monitoring, instead, should happen through:

- carrying out clear standards and policies
- evaluating programs
- investigating and resolving complaints
- developing and sharing good ideas and practices
- giving support
- correcting problems
- making sure all staff know what is required
- distributing funds and staff based on the needs of students
- assigning negative consequences for failure of staff to perform to acceptable standards.

BCPS needs to establish a system *at the school level* for identifying problems, correcting them and preventing the same problem from occurring again. A central data system should keep track of all problems and complaints system wide. This will allow BCPS to clearly see what problems take priority, where additional help is needed and take action to provide that help.

VI. Staff Development

All people involved in educating students with disabilities must receive ongoing, high quality training. This means that

- principals
- parents
- psychologists
- support personnel
- special education teachers
- regular education teachers
- paraprofessionals

in each school building should receive training in groups so they learn to work together to solve current and future problems.

Institute for Excellence

An "Institute for Excellence" should be established to provide ongoing training and support for everyone involved in the education of students with disabilities. The Institute should be created in collaboration with the Maryland State Department of Education, universities, and the private sector and be located at a major university.

VII. Promising Practices and Technical Support

Special education should be part of all efforts to improve education in city schools. Additionally, ongoing efforts must be made to share information and ideas about good programs and approaches. Staff members with expertise should be available to others in the system to provide support and advice.

VIII. The Management Team: Role and Responsibilities

A Management Team should be established to guide and oversee the implementation of the efforts to improve Special Education services. The team should have six members: three professionals from within BCPS (one school administrator, one central office manager and the Deputy Superintendent, Bureau of Instructional Programs) and three external experts with experience in policy, school administration, data management, effective instruction, parent participation and school based management.

Team members would :

- Monitor the progress of BCPS as it meets the objectives for improvement outlined in this plan [and ask for court intervention, if necessary]
- Provide technical assistance and leadership necessary to meet plan goals
- Assist all BCPS working groups focusing on the objectives of the plan such as development of training, conducting needs assessments, use of promising practices
- Conduct a comprehensive review of all management roles and responsibilities for special education

IX. Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Role and Responsibility

MSDE should pay for the creation of the full time position of Management Team Coordinator to work with the Management Team and BCPS as it creates and carries out its plan. The Coordinator would also collect information and data on the progress of the plan. MSDE should fund part of the training necessary to carry out the plan. MSDE should also work with BCPS to create the "Institute for Excellence", including giving partial funding for the Institute.

X. Resources

An examination of needs and costs must be completed to find out the exact cost of the planned improvements. However, the money now spent on Special Education, if used more effectively, should probably be enough to accomplish the goals of the plan. The cost of the Management Team activities would be about $300,000 for the first year.

The recommendations of the Court-appointed team lay a strong foundation for positive change in BCPS,

for both regular and special education students. This report suggests additional approaches to improve the education of students in BCPS and provides a look at how promising practices for students are being carried out in Baltimore and throughout the nation.

"Our children are our future. Isn't John one of our future? Or the other kids, are they not a future? Do you have to be walking with two legs, two arms, not in any special education? Just because you are in special education it doesn't mean that you are not bright. You have a learning disability. All of us can't be Einstein's. That's what makes the world go 'round, different people."

- Sharon Pilkerton, parent of John Pilkerton, a special education student with Muscular Dystrophy who attends Patterson High School.

WHAT THE LAW REQUIRES SCHOOLS TO PROVIDE

Both federal and state law have specific requirements which school districts must meet as they provide special education services. The ultimate goals of both sets of laws is to make sure that students with disabilities receive all of the services they need in order to get an appropriate education. The laws aim for special education students to receive as much instruction as possible in the regular classroom setting, a concept which is popularly called "inclusion."

The federal Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, Public Law 101-476 ("IDEA", 20 U.S.C. sec 1401 et seq.) requires that all students ages 3-21, regardless of any disability, get a "free and appropriate" public education in the "least restrictive academic environment" to the maximum extent possible and that their education be consistent with their individual needs. Under the Act, school systems receive funds from the U.S. government to help pay for this federally-mandated special education.

While the Act requires school systems to provide special education, it also requires them to let special education students participate in extra-curricular activities and as many regular classroom activities as possible. To minimize the amount of time students spend in a special education setting, the Act requires states to establish procedures to ensure:

> ...that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of handicapped children from the regular educational environment occurs *only when the nature of severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes* with the use of supplementary aids and services *cannot be achieved satisfactorily*...(20U.S.C.1412(5)(B)). [Emphasis added.]

In tandem with the federal regulations, Maryland law says the State Department of Education must ensure that inclusion be part of a comprehensive plan for special education in each of the local school districts.

THE CASE AGAINST BCPS

Right now, BCPS is under court order to meet the requirements of the state and federal laws. In 1984, in a case now titled Vaughn G. v. Walter G. Amprey, a group of students brought a lawsuit against BCPS, alleging that the school system had failed to properly assess their needs and implement their Individual Education Plans (IEP). BCPS and the students entered into a consent decree, by which BCPS agreed to meet the requirements of the law without having to go to a trial.

The decree requires, among other things, that BCPS evaluate students, place them in appropriate classes and provide them with appropriate services within specified time lines. The court also set up a Special Monitor to ensure BCPS met the goals. But the school system has never been in compliance with the requirements of the decree. In the summer of 1992, over the objections of BCPS, consultants were hired to figure out what the school system needed to do to comply with the consent decree. The report which resulted noted that BCPS did not seem to be living up to the terms of the consent decree.

> BCPS' "management" of Consent Decree Issues, to date, is questionable. Planning has been neither databased nor student-based. Most decisions have been made on the basis of habit and perception. Decisions have not been made on the basis of a rational process of problem solving.[51]

In its report, the Court-appointed team noted several "strikingly relevant" facts about BCPS which it said had a direct bearing on what should be happening to insure standards were met under the consent decree.[52] Among them:

- Compliance problems are most frequently found in middle and secondary schools. Elementary schools are often very well managed and are of high quality.
- Several high schools have in excess of 30 percent of their students identified as having special education needs. This is almost twice the district wide percentage.
- There is no system in place to track students as they move from school to school to receive services.
- As students move from elementary to secondary school age, their special education services are provided in more and more restrictive settings thus increasing the amount of time and indicating an ineffective special education intervention.
- The availability of vocational training at the secondary level for special education students is limited by arbitrary criteria for eligibility as well as a general unwillingness to encourage the participation of students with disabilities in vocational education.
- BCPS has twice the percentage (62.6) of students in service settings that require more services and segregation from peers than the Maryland state average and 25 percent more students in such settings than the next most segregated school system.
- By comparison, BCPS is a resource rich special education system that expends a significantly higher percentage of funds on special education than other similar size school systems and provides more funds per student for transportation than any other system of comparable dimensions and student populations.

Little is Special in Special Education

Are we ever going to get off division? Because in regular school I did fractions in the fourth grade.... I want to go to college."

These are the words of a 12-year-old sixth grade Special Education student who is taught in a separate wing of a Baltimore Middle School.[53] The girl's mother says her daughter is classified as having an emotional disability, but has always been a high achiever academically. "She should be on fractions, she should be on algebraic expression and that's what's so pathetic."

Low expectations for students in Special Education were frequently discovered by researchers who examined teacher attitudes and the actions of BCPS staff as a whole.[54] Little attention is paid to providing challenging or appropriate curriculum. Preparing students for any independent living once they complete school does not seem to be a goal. This is particularly disturbing considering that students with disabilities have the highest unemployment rate of any identifiable group in the country.[55]

Too often older BCPS students were not being taught material which was appropriate for their chronological age.[56] Teachers often relied on teaching techniques which were similarly inappropriate. At the middle and high school level, teachers sometimes used methods of instruction which were appropriate for elementary school students.[57] Education experts find this type of teaching to be of grave consequence because of the effect it has on student self-esteem and motivation.[58]

Across all age and disability levels, researchers found teachers were not helping students learn critical thinking and social skills, focusing instead almost solely on reading and math skills.[59] Even students with mild disabilities who could be expected to participate in the work force were not getting vocational guidance or training. This is due, in large part, to a BCPS rule that any student who cannot read at the fifth grade level may not enter a city-wide regular education vocational program.[60] The result is that the students who would benefit most and are most in need of such programs are excluded for no apparent reason.[61]

Researchers have found that, although the whole idea behind Special Education is to provide instruction to meet individual needs, little individualized teaching happens in many BCPS Special Education classes.[62] The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is the most critical element in determining how each special education student should be taught. The law requires that an *individualized* plan for each student be developed with input from parents and teachers.

The IEP should take into account each student's strengths and weaknesses. The result is to be a program that will teach to a student's strengths,

"If they can't teach him one thing, they can teach him survival skills. They are not teaching them anything! But he can learn, we know he can write. He knows his name, address, and telephone number. His only problem is that he can't talk. He knows everthing you say. See, they would talk about him. And then he would sit and cry. He would get upset."

- Carolyn Spence, grandmother of Devin McLaughlin, who has autism. He is a third grade special education student at Furman Templeton Elementary.

keeping in mind their weaknesses. Each IEP must have goals for each student to reach. When a goal is attained, the teacher is to note it and proceed to the next goal. That is what the law expects to happen. Researchers and advocates familiar with BCPS find that it rarely happens that way.[63]

In many instances, classroom teachers *did not even have a copy of their students' IEP's.*[64] But even if they had, it is unclear how useful they would be. Researchers have found that when IEP's are developed in BCPS, they often do not focus on the needs of particular students. Instead, they are often guides to do what is most convenient for school staff. Teachers told researchers that the IEP is often a statement of what the school wants to provide, not what the student really needs.[65]

Furthermore, researchers found that the goals and objectives listed in student IEP's often had no relation to any tests or other data about the students' abilities.[66] Often they were not the result of a process to meet individual student needs. The IEP's seemed to be prepared in advance and were very similar for large numbers of students.[67] Parent involvement in IEP preparation was very limited, if it occurred at all.[68] The IEP's rarely focused on important areas of development like vocational preparation, socialization or behavior. The goals were almost totally limited to reading, language arts and math.[69]

Student outcomes were rarely noted by teachers.[70] In instances where teachers did indicate the methods used, they never wrote whether the method worked for the student. This practice makes it very difficult to follow student progress from year to year or develop future plans based on past successes or disappointments.

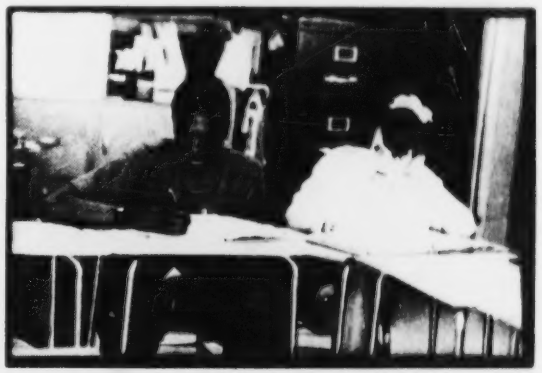
BCPS apparently had not developed a curriculum guide for use by special education teachers. In 1989, researchers found that each middle school teacher seemed to be interpreting what they needed to teach on their own, with virtually no input from the school system.[71] That practice resulted in a total lack of continuity or consistency in the education students were getting. Not only were teachers at different grade levels teaching in such a way that there was no connection between the instruction students got as they moved into higher grades, but instructors at the same grade level were not teaching the same subject matter.[72]

Special education teachers told researchers that they had little or no access to the general education curriculum, but they were still expected to adapt that curriculum for their students.[73] In fact, in 1989, researchers could not find any special education teachers who even knew how to get a copy of the general curriculum for BCPS students.[74] They noted that BCPS had not established any standards for adapting the curriculum.

NO WAY OUT

Once students have been classified as needing special education, there is almost no chance they will return to a general education setting. Researchers studying the special education programs in 26 large cities found that fewer than 5 percent of special education students ever completely left those programs and returned to general education.[75] Similar conditions exist in Baltimore City. Not only is there no formal criteria to decide which students should be enrolled in special education programs, but there are none to determine when a student should be placed back in a general education classroom.[76] Returning students to a regular education program is not even a goal for special educators in BCPS. And for students in separate classrooms, teachers report that they hold little or no expectation that these students could possibly "make it" in a regular class.[77] If a student was placed in special education because of behavior or attitude problems, there is no chance for them to return to a regular education program.[78]

Teachers and staff at separate schools for special education students seem to believe it is their mission to keep those students out of regular education, instead of getting them back into it. The Court-appointed design team found that at a separate elementary school for students with emotional problems, the staff was proud of the fact that students rarely (three out of ninety) leave the program.[79] The staff believed that this proved that the referrals were proper. The researchers believe this attitude is wrong.[80] They believe that the teachers' way of thinking is part of an attitude within the entire BCPS system. That attitude doesn't see students as capable, doesn't encourage innovative approaches to teaching and is resistant to change.[81]



Separate and Often Unequal

"They talk about whether you are black or whether you are white, and they talk about segregation. What about learning disabilities, aren't they segregated too?"

- Sharon Pilkerton, parent of BCPS Special Education Student at Patterson High School

The mother of a Middle School student in Special Education went to a PTA meeting with her daughter. Students presented a talent show before the meeting started. But none of the performers were her classmates. "She realized that," says the mother. She says her daughter even needs permission to join the glee club.

Every student who leaves the Baltimore City Public Schools will live in a world of diversity, where people have varying talents and abilities, resources and backgrounds. Yet, in BCPS, most students in special education are taken out of the society of their schools and placed in separate classes.

Some believe such separation is for the students' benefit. And in some cases, that may be true. But researchers examining BCPS have discovered that many more students are removed from regular education classes, not for the students' benefit, but for the convenience of the schools.

Special Education in Baltimore has become the "dumping ground" for those students with whom teachers don't want or know how to deal.[82] Often, students who are seen as trouble makers or slow learners end up in Special Education.[83] Once students are identified for special education, BCPS staff seems to expect that they will be removed as much as possible from the regular education environment.[84]

And that is what happens. More than half of Special Education students in BCPS - nearly 10,000 students - are assigned to separate classes or schools, segregated from their peers in regular education for most, if not all, of the school day.[85] Compare that to averages throughout Maryland, where nearly half of the special education students are taught in the *regular* class setting.[86] In Baltimore, less than one-fifth of Special Education students receive instruction in regular classes.[87]

The irony is that placing special education students in separate classes and schools costs far more than educating them in the regular class settings. And the separation often does not lead to a better education for the special education student. A body of academic research shows that the very act of separating special education students from their peers causes low self-esteem.[88] One psychologist found that the label of being "difficult to teach" may create more problems for the student than the disability

"We don't, like, get a chance to branch out and do certain things because we are in special education."

- Mello Summer, Special Education student in a separate class at Greenspring Middle School.

itself does.[89] Other researchers have found that removing students from the regular classroom limits students' expectation of success and lowers self-esteem, peer acceptance and academic performance.[90]

Federal and state laws emphasize the importance of including special education students in regular education programs, a concept often called "inclusion." Countless studies by professional educators have stressed that inclusion plays a crucial role in the proper development of special education students.[91]

The idea behind inclusion is that a student should get just the right amount of special services they need to assist them in learning without excluding them from the social and educational opportunities other students enjoy. For some students, it could mean that they can stay in the regular class, and a special education teacher joins the team of regular education instructors to develop alternative strategies and provide individualized instruction for the special education students in the group. That approach can minimize the label of different-ness and maximize understanding of students for one another.

But that is not the way most special education students are educated in Baltimore. Most are isolated in separate programs with little access to students in regular education. Special education teachers in BCPS told researchers that teachers in regular education did not have a favorable attitude toward inclusion and do not support students who are slow learners or have fallen behind.[92] Teachers often believe that special education students should only be allowed to share lunch, recess, homeroom and specials (like music) with students in regular education.[93]

Not only did the researchers who discovered this fact disagree with the teachers, they noted that limiting inclusion to essentially social activities was in direct contradiction to the federal law goal of educating students in the least restrictive environment.[94]

An "inclusive" education system - one which promotes the integration of special and general education into one system - is highly recommended by the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE).[95] When a system is inclusive, their 1992 report found, students are treated as individuals, with their individual needs and problems more clearly addressed.

The Court-appointed design team has recommended that one of the main goals of BCPS in reforming special education should be to reduce the number of special education students taught in separate classrooms to the state average of 31.5 percent.[96]

A System that Doesn't Work for Students

Baltimore's Special Education students often do not get the services they need because the system is poorly managed. When looking at Special Education overall, BCPS administrators are often unable to solve problems because they fail to collect enough of the right data to identify where the problems lie.[97] And there is no structure in place to solve problems, even if they could be identified. The result is that resources like funds and staff aren't sent where they are needed.[98]

BCPS was unable to provide some of the most basic data about special education for this report. BCPS officials said that its current data collection system doesn't allow them to accurately collect or summarize information about the progress and performance of special education students.[99] In fact, the Department of Special Education and Pupil Services reported that the department has not done a study or internal report on special education in the last five years.[100]

Among the most basic information BCPS could not supply:

- The number of special education classes in each school
- Student achievement compared to IEP goals
- Staff-to-student ratios by level of service
- Number of special education students receiving Chapter 1 services
- Number of special education students who were retained (failed a grade)
- Number of students referred for assessment for special education services by grade and school and the number placed in special education as a result of the referral
- Student placement (i.e. regular class, resource room, separate class, separate school) by type of disability
- The number of students referred to special education because of low academic performance or behavioral problems

BCPS was not even able to provide the Court-appointed team with a figure for the number of students who had been referred to special education.[101] Without this very basic information, it is difficult to know whether BCPS is meeting the requirements of the laws or providing any effective services to students. Accountability is impossible without some way to measure outcomes.

Among the findings of the Court-appointed team was that almost all of the violations of special education laws were occurring over and over again at less than half of the schools.[102] Yet, BCPS has no system in place to discover or correct such a problem.

The school system has purchased appropriate equipment to solve some of the data collection problems.[103] That is a good beginning toward improvement. But data collection alone will not solve the failures of this system.

The lack of coordination between the central office staff and teachers in the classroom create critical inadequacies for special education students. The pecial Education system, as currently designed, is essentially separate from regular education. School principals have no authority to get necessary staff or resources for Special Education students and are not held accountable for outcomes for those students either.[104] It is difficult to determine where responsibility lies for providing appropriate services for an individual special education student.

Researchers found that educational materials were not provided equitably to special education teachers, particularly on the middle and high school level. While some schools seemed to have a large supply of educational materials - including computers in some places - just as many schools didn't even have basic textbooks.[105]

For students in middle school who were actually reading at an elementary school level, textbooks they should have been using were not available.[106] The study also found that BCPS had not established any central library of resource material for special education teachers.[107] The only way teachers could find out about new teaching materials was on their own. And, teachers often made purchases of new materials with their own money.

To insure that each special education student is properly evaluated and that each IEP is appropriate, an ARD (Admission, Review and Dismissal) case manager (or special education department head) is assigned to oversee the cases of groups of students. ARD managers are accountable to central office, not school principals.[108]

Researchers found that the ARD process BCPS has established is "cumbersome and consumes a major amount of fiscal and personnel resources in the schools."[109] As a result, ARD managers spend an enormous amount of time filling out paperwork. And the situation is more difficult for those in the higher grades. The Court-appointed team noted that while ARD managers in elementary schools oversee the cases of approximately 125 to 150 students, in middle and high schools ARD managers could be responsible for as many as 500 students.[110]

The result is that department heads don't have time to provide support or evaluate the work of teachers in the Special Education classrooms. In interviews and surveys conducted by researchers, BCPS Special Education teachers were critical of the support process. They said they don't get adequate feed-

back on how they instruct students and they don't get "assistance when they encounter problems in the classroom."[111]

Along with changes in procedures and organization comes the need for additional training of staff. One study expressed "major concerns about the roles, functions and/or skill level of the special education department heads."[112] The Court-appointed team noted that psychologists who test students for referral to special education lack up-to-date knowledge about assessment of cultural minorities and students with disabilities in general.[113]

To better meet the needs of students, resources and accountability should lie closer to where the students are found. That means principals need to take an active role in leadership at the school level to provide all students, including those receiving Special Education services, with a quality education, meeting identifiable goals. The central administration must provide adequate resources for home schools to educate students with special needs. But the cost to do that would likely be far less than is currently spent to transport students to schools far from their homes.

How the System Can Work for Students

Special education students deserve more than the current BCPS system offers. For many students, the system simply isn't working. The recommendations of the Court-appointed design team will lay a strong foundation for the reform that is needed and should be adopted by the Board of School Commissioners.

In order for that reform to occur, the Superintendent of Public Instruction must take a strong leadership role in the process. Dr. Walter Amprey is to be applauded for the outcome-based approach to education which he is attempting to institute within BCPS. To make that effort succeed, he must make clear to all staff within the school system that special education students must be treated with the same priority as all other students. A good starting point will be to emphasize special education reform efforts both publicly and privately.

The ultimate outcomes of this reform effort must include the following:

- **Higher self-esteem for special education students** and an end to the labeling of these students.
- **Early intervention to stop the placement of students in special education who do not belong there** by employing early intervention strategies. Hand-in-hand with this should be the assurance that students who are placed in special education get an appropriate intensity of service.
- **End the separate - and distinctly unequal - relationship between general and special education.** Instead of having two separate systems, with little communication between the two, the general and special education systems must become fully integrated. This will improve the education of not only the special education students, but of general education students as well by directing more resources to classrooms.
- **Decentralize the management of special education.** Put authority and resources into the school building, not into Central Office staff. Make each school principal accountable for the providing a beneficial program for each special education student in their building.
- **End the excessive bureaucracy and red tape linked to special education** assessments and reviews which result in special education department heads spending too much time on paperwork and too little time assuring that the needs of students are met.
- **Create policies, procedures and staff training which make it possible for students to exit special education** and return to general education, if it is appropriate for the individual student.
- **Raise the graduation and attendance rates** among special education students to be at least on a par with their general education peers.

True reform requires a shift in the way *all* BCPS staff view Special Education. A commitment to positive outcomes is central to that change. But achieving that shift requires individual steps, some large and some small. The following chart developed for the New York City Public Schools shows one way of changing direction.[114]

FROM	TO
Ensuring that complex rules and regulations are complied with	Producing children who either move on to post-secondary education or competitive employment
Preoccupation with rigid timelines	Preoccupation with students needs
Preventing the wrong things from happening	Making the right things happen
Secluding special education students and staff	Embracing special education students and staff -- creating a single public school system to educate all children
Accepting parental involvement	Promoting parental involvement as key to success
Limiting staff development to one-shot activities	Making on-going, integrated staff development a way of life
Resisting accountability because of lack of staff development, resources and support	Accepting accountability at the school level for children's progress with appropriate staff development, resources and support
Telling professionals how to do their job	Giving professionals the flexibility to do their jobs the way they see fit
Making decisions about children in isolation or with minimum input from others	Collaborating with colleges to find solutions that meet children's needs

The key to making any reform effort work is to allow the individuals who must implement the plan, to help design the reform measures. Therefore, effective reform calls for the opportunity for staff at the school level to develop the methods for creating integration of special education into what used to be referred to as the mainstream. Teachers and school administrators, along with parents, must play a large role in developing plans at individual schools.

With this flexibility must also come resources, support and accountability. The responsibility for that will lie with the Superintendent and his staff. The guiding principle must be positive student outcomes, and all efforts must flow from that.

The changes supported here include six broad initiatives, each component of which is critical to the success of the overall plan. The information about programs and proposals from other areas, and Baltimore as well, are provided as guides for understanding what is possible. They are not recommendations that any one program need be adopted in its entirety.

INITIATIVE ONE:
CREATION OF A MISSION STATEMENT

BCPS has been working on the development of a statement of its vision for Special Education students and services. A clear mission statement which shows the commitment of the system to the education of *all* students must be shared with all staff and the community at large. Changing deeply held beliefs and attitudes is difficult and must start with strong administrative leadership. If the school system as a whole fails to view special education as an

integral part of all of its initiatives, there is no chance for special education students to truly be included. The mission statement must include the outcomes the system expects to result from its efforts.

The mission statement should have several key components. It should commit BCPS to integrating special and general education into one system, stressing that special education will be a temporary supplement to general education whenever possible. Students who need special education services will get as many of those services within a general education classroom as is possible.

The mission will assure that students who require special education have the same outcomes - such as graduation rates - as their general education peers where possible. To ensure that this happens, the statement must recognize that special education students may require different teaching methods and support services than general education students. Active and early participation of parents and students in decisions affecting the type of education the students will receive must be actively sought and encouraged.

The mission statement must not simply reflect the letter of Federal law, which requires that all students be taught in the "least restrictive environment" possible, but the spirit of that law must be a guiding principal.

Once developed and finalized, the mission statement must be communicated to all staff and the larger school community so that all concerned will have adequate information about the direction in which the school system is moving. Every opportunity to highlight the capabilities of special education students must be taken in order to gain support for the basis of the mission.

Positive practices which yield strong results must be displayed to staff and the community. An annual conference on innovative programs for special education students would be highly beneficial. It could be modeled on the conference for Chapter One educators and parents BCPS currently hosts. This conference should include not only special education teachers, but general education teachers as well as school administrators, participants from various social services agencies, the state Department of Education and - most importantly - parents.

INITIATIVE TWO:

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY TO THE SCHOOLS

The Court-appointed design team recommended that responsibility for overseeing the special education needs of each student be vested in the school principal, noting that "the principal is the focal point of the Plan to change special education in BCPS."[115] Moving responsibility away from Central Office administrators and into the hands of

professionals who are closer to the student is a critical element of improving special education. The change in roles will directly impact the ultimate goal of improving student outcomes. Staff will be assigned responsibilities which directly support students, instead of supporting paperwork and administration.

For this shift of responsibility to occur in a responsible way, intensive training of principals about the needs and abilities of special education students is crucial. The Kentucky Department of Education accomplished this through a 13-day intensive training program called Principals, Resources, Information and Direction for Excellence (PRIDE) in Special Education.[116]

During the training, principals are trained to understand their own feelings about working with students with disabilities and their parents. They learn strategies for motivating students with disabilities. They are also taught how to assure compliance with state and federal laws. Proper educational planning, goal assessment and progress evaluation is stressed. Perhaps most importantly, they learn the qualities of an effective leader.

Principals who participated in PRIDE overwhelmingly gave the project high marks. And, in a comparison between PRIDE participants and a control group, 93.3 percent of all indicators showed the program had a statistically significant positive impact on participants.[117]

The Court-appointed design team has recommended that principals get 20 days of training over a two-year period. It also recommends that ARD case managers should be trained with the principals because they need to develop a close working relationship and joint responsibilities for overseeing special education. [118]

Perhaps the most crucial element the principal would be required to do is ensure that:

- all special education students have IEP's
- IEP's meet student needs (not those of the school)
- IEP's are produced in a timely fashion
- IEP's are immediately and fully implemented
- needed changes are made

Principals must also be given resources and support personnel to accomplish these goals. Giving more responsibility to principals would free whatever Central Office staff remains for tasks which support special education services. The streamlined staff could concentrate on making sure resources are available where they are needed, develop methods to accurately monitor system-wide performance,

provide needed technical support to principals and focus on long-range strategies.

Area Assistant Superintendents should become the focal point for coordinating services, including staff and parent training, for schools in their areas. However, this should not mean that an added layer of bureaucracy is created.[119]

INITIATIVE THREE:

CREATE ONE SYSTEM FOR ALL STUDENTS

Services for students who qualify for special education must be strengthened, with an emphasis on providing as many of those services as possible within the general education classroom. Each special education student who successfully completes high school will be prepared for either appropriate post-secondary education or competitive employment.

An "inclusive" education system - one which promotes the integration of special and general education into one system - is highly recommended by the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE).[120] When a system is inclusive, the Association's 1992 report found, students get appropriate services to meet their needs. Students are treated as individuals, with their individual needs and strengths more clearly addressed.

Each school, with support from the central administration, must ensure that special and general education are fully integrated into one system. This would end communication problems and ensure that each student's individual needs are met in the least restrictive environment possible.

The Court-appointed team has recommended that BCPS set as a goal reaching the Maryland state average for integrated placements within two years.[121] This goal must be contingent on the work of individual schools toward developing a solid approach to integration and achieving necessary staff development. Merely dumping special education students into regular classrooms without the needed support or training would probably be worse than the conditions these students face today. However, an early start toward that goal, incorporating some of the following ideas, may make the target attainable in the time frame suggested.

1. Inclusive Education Committees.

Each school needs to establish an "Inclusive Education Committee" of teachers from special and general education, school administrators, guidance counselors, ARD case managers, related service providers, health care providers and parents. The Committee should be large enough to include all those needed to represent various facets of student needs, but small enough to ensure that it can func-

tion as a working group where individuals take responsibility. The Committee should:

- Assess the needs of the school and its students.
- Identify services and educational methods which will meet the needs of the school's students and staff. These include procedures within the school to ensure that special and general education are an integrated whole.
- Make sure that plans to integrate the system conform to the Mission Statement and to legal requirements of the Federal government and the State of Maryland.

A committee program, like the one described above, has already been instituted in several schools in Syracuse, N.Y. At the Edward Smith Elementary School, a committee was formed among general and special education teachers, therapists, and administrators.[122] The committee agreed upon five guiding principles in deciding into which classrooms students with special needs should be placed:

1. Flexibility is the key. Think creatively!
2. Consider students' needs and strengths along with teachers' strengths, preferences and needs.
3. Consider parents' preferences and knowledge of their children.
4. Find a way that fits the situation.
5. Develop a support network that benefits students and staff.[123]

Area Assistant Superintendents could serve a useful function in developing timelines for completion of school plans within their areas and making sure that schools receive the resources they request. Assessing the effectiveness of the strategies employed could also fall within the role of the Area Assistant Superintendent. This would allow for sharing of ideas and outside resources between schools.

2. Early Intervention Teams.

Using a number of different early intervention programs which have proven successful in keeping students in general education classrooms - including two currently in place in Baltimore - would become one of the most important elements of the plan. BCPS has already piloted a similar project called School Support Teams in 50 elementary schools as part of the Consulting Teacher program.[124]

These teams should be charged with ensuring that students get the help they need at an early age - from pre-kindergarten through grade 3 - to avoid assignment to special education or to placement in separate special education classrooms. Young children with learning disabilities and/or behavior problems should get special attention and reinforcement to keep them in the general education classroom. The

team would assist teachers with students who are at differing instructional levels and have differing needs, thereby reducing referrals to special education, enhance cooperation between special and general education teachers and lessen the stigma of being placed in special education.

Each early intervention team should be composed of general and special education teachers, school administrators, school-based psychologists and social workers, parents and the classroom teacher who needs assistance.

For students and teachers to obtain maximum benefit from early intervention, the team must work together. Once each team is formed, it should take the following steps:[125]

- Step 1: Team members meet and agree upon their roles and responsibilities.
- Step 2: Team members mutually define and gain an understanding of the student's problem.
- Step 3: The team engages in "brainstorming" to explore all possible solutions to the problem.
- Step 4: The team develops a specific plan to implement its solution to the problem, including a time line for the people responsible.
- Step 5: The team evaluates the plan before it is implemented.
- Step 6: After the plan is implemented, the team meets to assess its success and makes any modifications that are necessary to insure a successful outcome.

If a child is eventually placed in special education, the team will follow that child's progress to see if he or she has reached a point where they no longer require special education or can be moved to a less restrictive setting. As the plan for each child is implemented, team members should note which approaches seem to have the highest success or failure rate and adjust the plans accordingly.

Each year, the early intervention team in each school would make a written evaluation of the efforts made with each child so that the record of approaches used and whether they were successful will follow students through school, whether he or she is assigned to special education or not. The document could also prove useful in tracking the reasons for successes and failures and allow each school to modify its intervention approach accordingly.

3. Innovative Regular Education Programs

An integral part of early intervention should be the implementation of innovative programs at each BCPS elementary school.

The Consulting Teachers Program was begun in the 1992-93 school year within BCPS. The program provided intensive training in alternative strategies and processes for students who have behavioral or learning problems to master teachers from 50 elementary schools. Those teachers were relieved of their regular classroom duties in order to provide support to teachers in their schools.

These teachers demonstrate effective techniques and share printed, computerized and video resources through the creation of a library in every school. Teachers and parents are provided the opportunity to benefit from the materials.

At each school, the Consulting Teacher has established a School Support Team which meets weekly to develop strategies for challenging students. A team teaching arrangement between one regular and one special education teacher was developed as a model for others in the school building.

The program reduced referrals to special education by 35 percent in the first semester.[126] Expansion of this program is encouraged.

The Success For All program was devised by the Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students at Johns Hopkins University. It stresses early intensive intervention to keep student performance up to what is expected of each grade level.[127] Parents and teachers are encouraged to form an active partnership to foster the success of each student. Specifically, the program is designed to ensure that by the time students are in third grade, all of them are performing at a third grade level.

Starting at pre-kindergarten, Success For All emphasizes instruction to students in reading, writing, language arts and mathematics. Success For All not only targets academics, it also provides family support services. Those services focus on solving a student's non-academic problems which might interfere with academic achievement, and other difficulties such as truancy, behavior and health problems. A family support team provides a direct link to families and directs them to needed services.

At both Abbottston and City Springs Elementary, schools in Baltimore, special education referrals were reduced by 50 percent. The cost of Success for All is about $1,000 more per year per student.[128]

The Orton-Gillingham Multisensory approach helps students learn to read by having students use sound, sight and touch to learn letters. Letters are then synthesized into words the children already know. This approach has significantly improved reading scores and reduced referrals to Special Education. The cost of the program is about $500 more per child per year.[129]

The Waterford Institute Program has students work on their reading and math in a computer lab one period each day. This allows students to work at their own pace while providing feedback to the teacher about their progress. Reading scores improve 30 percent to 50 percent after one year. An initial cost of about $210,000 will purchase two laboratories with 64 stations. Thereafter, the cost is about $275 per year per child.[130]

Reading Recovery provides students with one-on-one, 30 minute lessons with a specially-trained teacher every day. Students learn to read through writing by developing strategies for hearing sounds in words and then checking their own reading. The program assures that the students most "at-risk" for reading failure will develop strategies to read at grade level. This program can be very costly in the short term because of the individualized attention students receive. However, it is less costly in the long run than special education placement.131

4. Collaborative Teaching Teams

Expansion of the efforts of the Consulting Teacher program to develop collaborative teaching teams is encouraged. A collaborative teaching team is one where two or more teachers - some from general education, another from special education - work together to teach one class, jointly developing lesson plans, teaching and assessing students. There are several different ways in which collaborative teaching can work:[132]

- One teacher gives instruction to the large group while the other circulates around the room, providing help to students with disabilities.
- The classroom can be divided, with each teacher providing instruction to half the class.
- One teacher can provide remedial instruction for students who need it, while the other teaches the rest of the class.
- Both teachers teach the class, with one teacher demonstrating a skill while the other describes it. Or, both teachers can engage in role playing for the students.[133]

Special education students who might normally receive services outside the classroom would no longer be segregated and stigmatized. Instead of being taken out of their regular classroom and herded off to some unseen place, or kept in a separate wing of the school building, they would get instruction along with the rest of their peers.

This approach also allows the special education teacher to stay more in touch with the general education curriculum while assisting the general educator with alternative approaches to instruction. It also

"John doesn't want to sit home for the rest of his life collecting social security. John wants to get a job. He wants to be independent. He wants to go places and do things...John went for vocational training assessment two years ago. They give him bricklaying, they give him carpentry, they give him auto mechanics - things that John can not do. There was nothing with the computer skills or communication skills or anything like this."

- Sharon Pilkerton, mother of John Pilkerton a student at Patterson High School.

allows the general education teacher to better understand the needs of special education students.

5. Vocational and Post-Secondary Transition

When they leave school, all students, including those in special education, need to know what it will be like to enter the work force. Vocational transition - accustoming students to the work place - is a key to ensuring success after they complete high school. The objective is to ensure that special education students can get jobs with marketable skills (and/or enroll in post-secondary education.)

When special education students have a real expectation of getting meaningful employment, they - just like general education students - tend to remain in school.[134] Currently, the absentee and dropout rate for special education students is even higher than for BCPS students in regular education. The National Longitudinal Transition Study (1989) found that when students with disabilities received vocational training, their absentee and dropout rates were significantly reduced.[135] Equally as important, those students also performed better academically.

To ensure that all special education students who want or need vocational education can get it, BCPS must end its policy of requiring students to have a fifth grade reading level before receiving vocational training with regular education students. As the Court-appointed design team noted, students who need vocational education the most are being excluded arbitrarily.

Vocational assessment is the key to help students make decisions about what they want to do and can realistically achieve once they finish high school. School guidance counselors must be part of the school planning process for inclusion. They will help students and their parents assess students' interests, aptitudes and skills. Those counselors should be thoroughly acquainted with what types of jobs or educational opportunities are available for students .

From 1988 through 1991, the New York City Public Schools helped to make sure that adequate counseling would be available for students by specially training teachers to be vocational transition counselors. The school system paid for graduate credits and allowed teachers to complete assignments outside the school system as an incentive.[136]

Under federal law, BCPS is now required to include any transition plans, whether vocational or for higher education, in each student's IEP by the time they reach age 16. To help share the cost of vocational transition, BCPS should enter into cooperative agreements with the Baltimore Office of Employment Development to work on these issues with funds which may be available through the Jobs

Training Partnership Act and Demonstration Projects (funded by the U.S. Department of Labor).

Once students decide what they want to do, they must be provided with opportunities for training and supported employment. This may be accomplished through cooperative efforts with organizations such as The Chimes, STEP or East Baltimore Resources, Inc. Such programs could allow students to perform competitive jobs with additional support, and gradually be introduced to the real stresses of the work place. In that way, they would have time to adjust to the stresses placed on non-disabled workers in the same environment. This program will allow special education students to secure employment in a job market which is increasingly competitive.

For special education students who want to go to college, counselors must become familiar with what colleges have to offer. Similarly, BCPS should make an effort to reach out to admissions officers at area colleges and educate them about the capabilities of special education students and to find out how better to prepare BCPS students for admission to institutions of higher education.

In order to evaluate the success of this program, BCPS should provide follow-up services and keep track of student employment for several years after the student completes high school.

INITIATIVE FOUR: STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

The Court-appointed design team has recommended that an Institute for Excellence be established to provide on-going training and support for BCPS staff and parents. The Institute would be a collaborative effort among BCPS, the Maryland State Department of Education, universities and the private sector and would be housed at a major university which could provide technical and logistical support. The Institute would focus on training teachers and staff in cooperative learning and team teaching techniques as well as approaches to special education procedures. This would help ensure that teachers know the most innovative and respected teaching techniques for special education students. Teachers would be able to earn credit for each course they took.

This Institute could provide the type of specialized training that central office staff, area assistant superintendents, principals, special educators and general educators will need to effectively include special education students in regular class settings. It can also provide training in alternative teaching styles to assist teachers with students who may need extra help or behavioral management, but not special education.

Sharing resources is also an important function which needs to occur at the school level. The Con-

sulting Teacher program is a good beginning toward that goal. The Montgomery County Public Schools have also developed a training support system and a data bank for the dissemination of new educational materials to special education teachers.[137] That data bank has been divided into seven separate areas:

- Assessment and programming, which includes testing and measurement materials, and material regarding learning styles.
- Counseling and human relations, including the latest information on counseling and guidance techniques and self-help materials.
- Individualizing instruction and curriculum, including new teaching methods and strategies, academic content areas and selection and modification of curriculum.
- Behavior management, including how to implement behavior modification, discipline and self-control.
- School and family consultation, including family consultation training.
- Inclusion issues, including information on the law, teaching and IEPs.
- In-service training.

BCPS must also make a commitment to providing support to classroom teachers above and beyond the training and materials phase. They must have access to needed services in the school system and the community. This will be accomplished in part by giving principals greater authority to make school-based staffing and resource decisions.

Another strategy toward that goal is the publication of an annual Directory of Services which are available to special education students both within the school system and the larger community. The Directory would list resources such as public and private social service organizations, family counseling services, employment and job development services, and literacy programs. This information would be very useful to teachers in the classroom and parents. The very act of compiling and disseminating this information should reinforce among BCPS staff the notion that the needs of all students can be met in part by integrating students into the larger community.

INITIATIVE FIVE: FAMILY PARTICIPATION

A formal program which not only allows parental involvement, but actively encourages it is essential to student achievement in all types of education. This is even more critical for special education students. The involvement of parents is mandated by law and common sense.

The Court-appointed design team has recommended that all parents of special education students should get training side by side with principals and

teachers. They further recommend that parent organizations should join together "to ensure quality for all students." The team also noted that BCPS must put a system into place which would quickly and effectively resolve parent issues.

A parent training program throughout the entire school system would be a powerful tool for improved student outcomes. Starting with special education parents is a good beginning.

Parents or other family members should be informed about the philosophy of special education in BCPS, IEP procedures, changes in curriculum and community resources at least once a year - either in writing or through training programs.

Outreach activities - particularly providing emotional and social support to the parents of special education students - are particularly important. These can include linking parents to professionals outside the school system who can help them learn how to make informed choices about their children. Parents need to know where they can turn if their children have problems.

One of the most important elements of this outreach would be to urge parents to become involved in the Early Intervention Team and the Inclusive Education Committee of their children's schools.

Parents must be partners in their children's education. Nationally, two urban school districts have devised successful programs to include the parents of special education students in their children's education.

In San Diego, under the *Special Education Parent Facilitator Program* (SEPF), parents of special education students are hired to help teach the parents of other special education students.[138] The SEPF parents are given 80 hours of training on organization of the school system, laws and pending legislation, communications skills, the IEP process and personal time-management skills. Once they are trained, they teach other parents how to navigate their way through the school bureaucracy.

SEPF parents also act as advocates for their children and help school staff understand parents' needs. While San Diego pays for 16 SEPF parents (2 full-time, the others part-time), the district believes it has saved money overall because it has reduced the cost of mediating disputes between parents and the school system.[139]

In New York City, the school system has implemented a parent-trainer program, which also aims to actively encourage parents to become involved with the needs of their children. Much like the SEPF program, parents learn to become effective advocates for their children. And, like SEPF, outside

"I just don't throw my child at you and say hey, here's my child, teach him something. I want to come and act with you, find out what is going on in the classroom with my son. Is he learning anything? Is he not learning anything? Is there anything I can help you with? Is there anything I can explain to you that could help you?"

- Michelle Spence, mother of Devin McLaughlin, student at Furman Templeton Elementary.

evaluation deems the program a success, after only three years.[140]

INITIATIVE SIX: IMPROVED MANAGEMENT

Improved management of the Department of Special Education and effective collaboration with other departments within BCPS is essential to any reform effort. This can only be accomplished with a solid base of accurate information and a commitment from school leadership to plan and carry out strategies with the needed resources and support. Given the high proportion of the budget spent for special education, redirecting those funds to the school and classroom level would provide more cost-efficient programs while providing increasingly effective services.

BCPS administrators are to be congratulated for recognizing the problems with their data collection system and working to improve it. Once BCPS gets its new system up and running, the Department of Special Education should be able to develop plans, budgets and strategies which help ensure special education students are provided the services they need.

This data system will also help BCPS target schools which seem to be referring too many students into special education. The Central Office can then concentrate efforts to see that Early Intervention Programs are effectively implemented and to determine whether these referrals are proper. If the referrals do not seem to be meeting student needs in the least restrictive environment, BCPS Central Office can then help the school develop a plan to correct the problem.

With extensive staff development and support in place and a large number of central office staff assigned to individual schools, the system should be able to more effectively assess its needs and develop a plan to serve all children.

The proposed Management Team approach of the Court-appointed design team must be given the opportunity to work. The cost involved is a very small amount compared to the potential savings of wasted resources without it. Including outside experts in a team with BCPS administrators will relieve some of the burden on BCPS staff to develop a plan they have been unable to develop themselves ones the many years that the difficulties in Special Education have been highlighted. It may also increase the support given by the larger community to the strategies which result.

CONCLUSION

Baltimore City Public Schools have begun small steps in the direction of needed reform. Now a new philosophy, backed by the will to take bold action

is required. The problems that students in special education bring to school are often aggravated by the schools and the system within which they operate. This is not the desire of any educator. To change those outcomes must now be the goal of *all* educators within the BCPS system.

The schools have been given a blue print for change by the Federal Court. Additionally, many programs and concepts exist within and outside of BCPS which have positive impacts for students. It is the responsibility of the BCPS administration to carry out those positive practices for all students and take the lead by changing the way they run the system. They must require accountability from educators and create an efficient and effective management system to allow schools to do what is necessary to meet students' needs.

This requires a major change in attitude and approach. But this shift cannot wait. A credible plan for reform has already been developed. Fighting that plan in court, instead of implementing it, is not in the best interest of students. Litigation is not the answer to meeting the needs of children. Time is running out. Too many students are lost every year schools and the system they work within choose to do nothing or too little. The call for reform: begin now and make schools special for *all* of Baltimore's students.

Endnotes

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[2]*Ibid.*

[3]*Ibid.*; Rostetter, D., Norman, M. and Gould, M., *Building Blocks for Improvement. Report of the Court Appointed Design Team in Vaughn G. v. Walter G. Amprey*, February 1993, page 27. In 1992, the Federal Court in the matter of Vaughn G. v. Walter G. Amprey, a suit brought by special education students in BCPS, appointed a team of experts to review the state of compliance with the State and Federal Special Education laws and provide recommendations for change.

[4]Rostetter, page 26.

[5]McLaughlin., page 14.

[6]*Ibid.*, page 13.

[7]*Ibid.*, page 5.

[8]*Ibid.*, page 6.

[9] *Ibid.*, page 12.

[10] *Ibid.*, page 11.

[11] *Ibid.*, page 12.

[12] *Ibid.*, page 10.

[13]Maryland State Department of Education, Least Restrictive Environment Placements Summary, 1991-1992, Table 2.

[14]Adkins, Gary, "Educating the Handicapped in the Regular Classroom," *The Education Digest*, 56(1), 1990, page 24.

[15]Madden, N. A., Slavin, R. E., "Mainstreaming students with mild academic handicaps: Academic and Social Outcomes," *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 53, 1983.

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[21]Rostetter, page 14.

[22]McLaughlin, page 3.

[23]Rostetter, page 23.

[24] *Ibid.*, page 31.

[25] *Ibid.*, page 32.

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] *Winners All: A Call for Inclusive Schools,* Report of the National Association of State Boards of Education Study Group on Special Education, October 1992, page 7 citing University of Minnesota study.

[28] Maryland State Department of Education, Least Restrictive Environment Placements Summary, 1991-1992, Table 1. The distribution for the remainder of students: 31.1% Speech Impaired, 9.2% Mentally Retarded, 6.6% Emotionally Impaired, 5.2% Multi-Handicapped, and 2.8% all other disabilities.

[29]Maryland State Department of Education, Least Restrictive Environment Placements Summary, 1991-1992, Table 10.

[30]McLaughlin, page 5.

[31] *Ibid.*

[32]Madden, N., Slavin, R., Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students at Johns Hopkins University, April 1993.

[33]Baltimore City Public Schools, "Consulting Teachers' First Semester Report," Executive Summary, March 1993.

[34]Baltimore City Public Schools, Superintendent's Budget Summary for School Year 1993-1994, April 1993, page 22.

[35] *Ibid.*, page 20; Baltimore City Public Schools, Department of Fiscal Management.

[36]*Ibid.*

[37]Rostetter, page 21.

[38]Baltimore City Public Schools, Department of Fiscal Management.

[39]Baltimore City Public Schools, Superintendent's Budget Summary for School Year 1993-1994, April 1993, pp. 20, 22.

[40] *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 33.

[41]Baltimore City Public Schools, Department of Fiscal Management.

[42] Rostetter, page 37.

[43] *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 31, 32.

[44] *Ibid.*, page 14.

[45] *Ibid.*, page 37.

[46] *Ibid.*, page pp. 31 - 35.

[47]McLaughlin, page 11.

[48]Rostetter, page 20.

[49] *Ibid.*, pp. 39 - 76.

[50]Cresap/Towers Perrin, *Management Study of the Baltimore City Public Schools*. June 1992.

[51]Rostetter, page 11.

[52] *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 14.

[53] The mother of this student requests that her daughter remain anonymous.

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[55] Gerry, Martin, former Assistant Secretary of Research and Evaluation for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, speech before the LRP Conference, "Full Inclusion of Children and Youth with Disabilities in Community Schools," Washington, D.C., October 1, 1992.

[56] McLaughlin, page 9.

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] *Ibid.*

[59] *Ibid.*, page 3.

[60] Rostetter, page 34.

[61] *Ibid.*

[62] McLaughlin, page 12

[63] McLaughlin, page 11; School House Legal Services, March 1993.

[64] McLaughlin, page 11.

[65] *Ibid.*

[66] *Ibid.*.

[67] *Ibid.*, page 12.

[68] *Ibid.*

[69] *Ibid.*

[70] *Ibid.*

[71] *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 7.

[72] *Ibid.*

[73] *Ibid.*

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] *Winners All*, page 9.

[76] McLaughlin, page 14.

[77] *Ibid.*

[78] *Ibid.*

[79] Rostetter, page 34.

[80] *Ibid.*

[81] *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 35.

[82] McLaughlin, page 6.

[83] *Ibid.*, page 3.

[84] *Ibid.*, page 14.

[85] Maryland State Department of Education, Least Restrictive Environment Placements Summary, 1991-1992, Table 2.

[86] *Ibid.*

[87] *Ibid.*

[88] Adkins, p. 24.

[89] *Ibid.*

[90] *Ibid.*

[91] *Winners All*, page 16.

[92] McLaughlin, page 14.

[93] *Ibid.*

[94] *Ibid.*

[95] *Winners All*, page 12.

[96] Rostetter, page 40.

[97] *Ibid.*, page 6.

[98] *Ibid.*

[99] Response from Baltimore City Public Schools, Departments of Research and

Evaluation and Special Education to data request and request for additional information from Students First.

[100] *Ibid.*

[101] Rostetter, page 14.

[102] *Ibid.*, page 38.

[103] Baltimore City Public Schools, Department of Research and Evaluation.

[104] Rostetter, page 25.

[105] McLaughlin, page 7.

[106] *Ibid.*

[107] *Ibid.*

[108] Rostetter, page 25.

[109] McLaughlin, page 4.

[110] Rostetter, page 20.

[111] McLaughlin, page 16.

[112] *Ibid.*

[113] Rostetter, page 31.

[114] Hornbeck, page 20.

[115] Rostetter, page 44.

[116] Lindsey, Betty, PRIDE: Principals, Resources, Information and Direction for Excellence in Special Education, paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council of the States of In Service Education, Nashville, Tennessee, 1986, page 3.

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[118] Rostetter, pp. 64, 65.

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[134] Wagner, M., *Dropouts with Disabilities: What do we know? What can we do?*, A report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students, SRI International, Menlo Park, California, 1991, page 40.

[135] *Ibid.*

[136] Flugman, B., et al, "Training Transition Linkage Coordinators for Urban High Schools," Center for Advanced Study in Education, City University of New York, New York, New York, 1991, page 4.

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